

How can the patient with advanced cancer—which, we are reminded, is not a synonym for “terminal cancer”—be most successfully managed? The speakers at the conference used these key words: continuity, contact, communion, comfort, sensibility, sensitivity, realism, confidence and, above all—a sense of tomorrow, a sense of hope. Since each patient may improve, we must be persistent and deny medical passivity. But, we must also protect the patient from the medical or nursing urge to do something, anything, at the very end. Our duty is to prolong life, *not* the act of dying. And, at the end of the journey, we must respect the patient’s wish that he leave behind the inheritance of an unscarred memory, a quiet reverence, a certain admiration.

After repeated emotional crises, one wonders how physicians themselves manage to survive—plagued by guilt, burdened by confusion over life and death and by rampant pessimism. We can not let ourselves withdraw from what we may conceive as our own failure. For, to the patient, this withdrawal may be mistaken for abandonment and, in response, he can become demanding, hostile or depressed. We—the physician, the patient, the family—must be attentive, for at no other time in life is the need for human contact greater than when death approaches.

Many other important problems were discussed at the conference: the urgent need to end the prudish public silence about cancer; the role of labor and industry in cancer prevention; the availability of insurance for the recovered cancer patient; programs to help the patient return to his community and his job; the functions of the American Cancer Society in providing services extending from initial information and counselling to rehabilitation; and the new role of the federal government in cancer control.

The Conference on Human Values and Cancer taught us that we must continue to use everything at our disposal to help “the obscure men and women who daily accept reality with a smile and whose silent courage makes lives worthy of being lived.” It also taught us to place human priorities above all other priorities. The greatest asset our country has is its people; the greatest threat to our future comes not from bombs or missiles but when we no longer care.

Arthur I. Holler M.D.

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